

Rethinking Settler Colonialism

Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita

1848/1948: Two Watershed Moments

The year 1948 was the Nakba, the year of catastrophe for Palestinians. For Mexicans in the US Southwest, Nakba came in 1848, with Mexico's loss of almost half of its territory and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo that subsumed the northwest of Mexico into the United States. There is much that we, the people of Mexican origin in the United States, share with the Palestinians living in Israel as well as those living in the West Bank and Gaza. Significant differences notwithstanding, what we do have in common is the dispossession of lands as well as a history of living a second-class status under a hegemonic state power imposed by historical circumstance. History has much to teach us in this regard, both in terms of commonalities and in terms of divergences.

We want to start by noting the marked differences between Israeli settler colonialism in Palestine and the situation of the contemporary Mexican-origin population in the United States, so as not to conflate the two situations. First off, an important distinction needs to be made between an indigenous population, like the Native Americans or the Palestinians, and a colonist settler population, like the Spanish Mexicans in the US Southwest in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; there is also an important historical difference between the apartheid wall that separates the West Bank from Israel and, for example, the border wall that separates Tijuana from San Diego/San Ysidro. While both were clearly erected to divide, we must understand that they are barriers of different orders. Revealing parallels aside, while it is true that the Mexican-origin population suffered—and continues to suffer—acts of violence, racism, aggression, and xenophobia at the hands of the occupying dominant Anglo population since 1846, the Palestinians have been subject to far greater injustices under more recent Israeli colonialism. Moreover, racial profiling, segregation, and denial of equal rights in the United States have never been restricted solely to people living under settler colonialism in occupied territories, as is evident in the history of nineteenth-century Chinese workers, African Americans, and

women in the United States. A look at these substantive differences begs a brief historical overview of the two geographic areas and of the issue of settler colonialism and its consequences.

Notions of decolonization have dominated many Chicano/a scholarly works in the last four decades.¹ Colonialism and the notion of the ensuing regimes of coloniality as a framework to interrogate not only past history in Latin America but present-day Latin America and the situation of Latino/a minorities in the United States are also currently very much in vogue. In what is clearly an implicit questioning of these framings, our rereading of the settler colonial model in these two contexts takes issue with the colonial/postcolonial/decolonial/neocolonial and internal colonial models that have often framed the discussion of Latin America and the situation of Chicano/as; these have limitations and prove in the last instance insufficient to the task at hand, which is providing explanatory efficacy for social phenomena arising from radically different circumstances.

Today, to quote Fredric Jameson, “postmodern people live within several coexisting situations all at once.”² This recognition may allow us to see variants of slavery and servitude within our contemporary society, especially in the case of immigrant workers held against their will and in the case of peonage or the neoslavery of poor blacks in the South. But our multiple situations as Latinos/as within the United States cannot be sufficiently explained in terms of colonialism or decolonization, much less postcolonialism. Clearly, we need to examine the frameworks with which we grasp our history and explain our multiple situations, full of nuances and contradictions as they are. The analogy drawn between Gaza and Tijuana made by Laura Pulido and David Lloyd in a recent issue of *American Quarterly*, while useful in opening up a discussion that enables us to counter dominant anti-Palestinian propaganda and to shed critical consideration on US involvement in Israeli aggression against Palestine, does bring into focus the problematic issue of settler colonialism and in so doing obliges us to do some work at unpacking the comparisons such a juxtaposition entails.³ In what follows we address (1) the differences between settler colonialism in Palestine and the situation of the Mexican-origin population in the United States, (2) the difference between an indigenous population and a colonist settler population, and (3) the historical difference between the apartheid wall that separates the West Bank from Israel and the border wall that separates Tijuana from San Diego/San Ysidro.

There can be no doubt that today settler colonialism is the driving force of Israeli illegal occupation and colonization of Palestinian land, but is this colonialism similar to that of 1848 and thereafter in the US Southwest? The

discussion of settler colonialism in the United States as presented by Pulido and Lloyd collapses different historical periods and ignores that most present-day Chicano/as are the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of immigrants who came to this country after 1900, long after the initial occupation of Mexican territory. The Southwest, the area where the population of Mexican origin and other Latinos largely reside, even today when we can be found in every state of the Union, has, we would argue, undergone at least two types of colonization, and these differences should not be skirted or blurred. If colonization refers to a state-sponsored settlement, then, following Patrick Wolfe's distinction (based on Amílcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, and others), we find two types of colonial models at work in the Southwest. The first, the franchise or dependent colonialism, refers to a colonization by a relatively small minority population of an area with an extant majority population on whose labor the incoming minority comes to be dependent. The second is that of settler colonialism that is not "established to extract surplus value from indigenous labor."⁴ In this case, by contrast, says Wolfe, the colonists displace or eliminate the natives wholesale.⁵ What is not explicitly stated here, but perhaps conveniently taken as a given, is that colonization of whatever type is generally initiated by armed invasion or wars of aggression. Clearly, Israeli military and civilian aggression have paved the way for the present-day process of settler colonialism in Palestine.

We must bear in mind, however, that mass migration and settlement are not inherently synonymous with colonialism. Early migrations from Asia and the Pacific Islands that brought a heterogeneous population across the Bering Straits and the Pacific to the Americas were not state-sponsored migrations. Those who settled here thousands of years ago are the indigenous populations of the Americas, the Native Americans. Neither is an indigenous population synonymous with a settler colonial population. An indigenous population is one that has resided in an area for hundreds if not thousands of years and for whom that territory or soil is constitutive and defining of who the people are, as Geronimo explained about Apaches and his connection to the land known now as Arizona.⁶

The Palestinian Question

The Palestinians are, in fact, the indigenous population of Palestine, which includes the territory now called Israel. When early twentieth-century Zionists began seeking territory for a Jewish state, the area of Palestine was, and had long been, primarily Arab-inhabited land. Jewish diaspora under the

Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar as far back as 586 BCE had forced a good number of Jews from Judah to Babylon. As Robin Cohen makes clear: “By the fourth century BC there were already more Jews living outside than inside the land of Israel.”⁷ By 1919, when the Zionist program began to be developed, Jews living in the area of Palestine represented only one-tenth of the whole population.⁸ The Zionist project began to encourage immigration to Palestine, despite Arab resistance to the usurpation of the Palestinian homeland, and, already in 1936–39, a revolt against Palestinian dispossession was crushed by the British.⁹ The formal constitution of the Jewish state in 1948 brought down on the Palestinians not only terror, violence, and massacres but the physical displacement of hundreds of thousands (about 750,000) after 1948 but also after the 1967 War (about 550,000).¹⁰ The forced exodus of a Palestinian population that had resided in Palestine for over two thousand years was enabled by hegemonic powers for whom this violent uprooting and diaspora was not an issue of consequence or reprehensible. And of course the process of dispossession continues with the illegal occupation of Palestine, the establishment of the apartheid wall between the West Bank and Israel that limits the mobility of the Palestinians within the West Bank itself, the criminal siege of Gaza that denies the Palestinians humanitarian aid, and the continued building of Israeli settlements on the West Bank. Through a series of mechanisms, what Israel in fact seeks is either to drive all the Palestinians from the land or to subjugate them into a passive, impotent colony that accepts Israeli domination and the destruction of the Palestinian nation.

The Palestine example allows us to consider various features that are typical of colonialism or settler colonialism. Let us focus for the moment on “colonialism” as a political category that refers to the imposition of a foreign political formation on natives of lands conquered by outside forces. This political formation is accompanied by an economic formation, that is, by the imposition of a mode of production on the natives, but the economic modality may vary, according to the historical moment. What is generally true is the following: (1) there is a war, or wars, of aggression that leads to the physical occupation of a territory; (2) there is then either the subjugation of the indigenous population of that territory that is compelled into forced labor, as in the case of the indigenous population in Latin America, or there is the removal of the indigenous population by annihilation or by forcing it to relocate to other geographic areas, as in the case of the Native Americans either killed by soldiers and settlers or removed to Indian Territory in Oklahoma or to reservations, and in the case of the Palestinians, removed to Gaza and the West Bank or forced to flee and reside in refugee camps in other nation-states; (3) in the process of territorial

occupation there is a dispossession of the population that may take various forms; (4) the colonial state establishes a preferential identity that entitles particular races or people, as in the case of the Jews, to certain rights and benefits denied to others, like the Palestinians, and, of course, the state also legitimizes its course of action via laws that in turn produce new violence, as noted by Achille Mbembe, to ensure the maintenance, spread, and permanence of the colonial authority;¹¹ and concomitantly, (5) the state suppresses opposition to the regime.¹² This suppression leads of course and necessarily to reaction and/or rebellion.

Different Modalities of Imperialism: New Enclosures

Under neocolonialism or the more modern forms of imperialism, however, there need be no outright war of aggression or territorial appropriation, as a population can be dominated and dispossessed through economic (as in dependency theory) or extraeconomic means, such as laws and government-backed policies and practices. Economic domination often takes the form of enclosures established in the colonized or neocolonized nations by an imperialist power or its surrogates to separate workers from their means of production and force them into wage labor or to migrate or emigrate, as is happening today to workers in the global South.¹³ Of course enclosures can be established internally, as in the case of displaced serfs in early modern England. Enclosures established in Mexico by agribusiness, US industries, and NAFTA have forced displaced workers to migrate to the border to seek work in the maquilas or to large cities, like Mexico City, Monterrey, or Guadalajara, and are also the “push factor” to emigrate to the United States. Once in the United States, these immigrants are subject to exploitation, xenophobia, racism, criminalization, and oppression. Life under a racist class structure is not, however, equivalent to colonialism. Nor is the situation of Chicanos/as within the United States a case of an internal colony, for it is more complicated than that.

The term *internal colony* has been used to describe the situation of the Mayas in Chiapas, according to Pablo González Casanova, as the Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Choles, Zoques, and Tojobales continue to be pushed from their lands, exploited, driven to starvation, and culturally and linguistically oppressed.¹⁴ While it is true that the indigenous populations of Mexico have suffered dispossession and superexploitation since colonial times, today what is occurring in Chiapas is more the product of global capital that is pushing for a renewed displacement of the indigenous population through current processes of enclosure. Today, global capitalist interests, both foreign and Mexican, in the flora and fauna of

the Lacandona jungle, in its natural resources, like uranium, wood, and oil, have led to the institution of new enclosures not directly related to those imposed under colonial regimes. Enclosures are today a neoliberal tactic for dispossession of the commons and the creation of a waged labor force that submits to the landlords, lumber companies, eco-based companies, and engineering companies. These are instances of present-day imperialism; these enclosures are practiced not only against indigenous groups in Mexico but against workers throughout the world. In Chiapas, the Mayan indigenous population has organized movements of resistance, among them the Zapatistas, that seek to expose and retaliate against these capitalist attempts to decimate the indigenous population, destroy their commons and habitat, and exploit their resources.

Today, what Alex Callinicos terms capitalist imperialism or “the imperialism of free trade” is what the United States has been imposing in Latin America throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹⁵ This nonterritorial imperialism and its neoliberal policies operate to further the interests of capitalism, as evident in the US restructuring of its own economy and the establishment of assembly plants to produce goods in the global South, even as it has continued to exploit Latin American resources, be it oil, copper, tin, wood, and so forth, as well as agricultural production, but often now under the aegis and management of agribusiness and supranational entities like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Today, the populations of Latin America often live simultaneously under modernity and postmodernity, fully swayed by the market and consuming the cultural production as well as the consumer goods produced by the metropolitan states, primarily the United States, in accordance to individual buying power and social status. What has not changed is that a class structure continues to dominate the area and determines consumption and mobility. For clearly what continues to characterize life in Latin America is the class struggle. But the question becomes: in what way is that so different from what we Latinos/as live with daily in these United States? Crucial particulars aside, we all live under the same totality, that is, under global capitalism.

We would argue that the class structure of the United States, immigration, and racism better explain the situation of the Mexican-origin population in the United States today, especially in the Southwest, rather than settler colonialism. But first, let us briefly examine more closely the Palestinian issue, which is both different and in many ways more complex than ours. An accounting and clearer sense of the current Palestinian issue is urgent, since we, as Chicanos/as/Latinos/as, as US citizens and residents, are complicit in the current destitution, displacement, and even genocide of Palestinians in view of the fact that

the United States provides Israel with close to \$3 billion dollars a year of our tax dollars, much of it in military aid. In the Gaza war of 2008–9 Israel's use of indiscriminate and intentional force against the civilian population of Gaza left fourteen hundred Gazans dead, an attack that the United States supported materially, providing US weapons. The United States also blocked cease-fire efforts and gave unwavering diplomatic support to Israel. Bluntly put, to quote the US linguist Noam Chomsky, "we are their partners in crime."¹⁶ Last year Israel subjected Gaza to eight days of bombardment. As Chomsky again makes clear, "The Israeli decision to rain death and destruction on Gaza, to use lethal weapons of the modern battlefield on a largely defenseless civilian population is the final phase in a decades-long campaign to ethnically cleanse Palestinians."¹⁷ Israeli aggression in Palestine is best comparable with—and has its historical correlate in—US aggression against its Native American population, which it decimated throughout the nineteenth century, to dispossess them of the lands where they lived and worked, and which it continues today in multiple ways. Israeli aggression in Palestine is likewise also comparable with US aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq, against Vietnam, Korea, and Central American countries like Nicaragua and Guatemala. In this regard it is not quite comparable with US aggression against the Mexican population in the Southwest, for despite human losses in the US–Mexican war, casualties in that conflict were not primarily in the Southwest territory but in central Mexico, although here in the Southwest, too, occupation and dispossession were the ultimate objectives.

It is precisely this issue of dispossession that is especially striking and revealing. To highlight the differences between our two cases, let us return to our 1848/1948 benchmarks to review some further facts. While Palestinians were the majority native population in 1948 in the area of Palestine, now controlled by Israel, and had resided there for centuries, Mexican/Spanish settlers were at best a small population, somewhere between seventy thousand and one hundred thousand in the vast lands of the Southwest, that had resided somewhere between 77 and 150 years in the Southwest by 1846 and, more importantly, had themselves dispossessed and subjugated the Native American peoples of the area. In what became the US Southwest, the indigenous population that migrated to the area of the Americas some twenty-five thousand years ago would be oppressed, exploited, dispossessed, and eliminated first by the Spanish explorers, conquerors, and settlers and later by Mexican and Anglo colonists. What needs to be stressed is that the indigenous population that resided here for thousands of years is most comparable to the displaced Palestinian population.

Occupation and Dispossession in the US Southwest

Spanish colonists came to what is now New Mexico in the seventeenth century and to what is now Texas and California in the eighteenth century. The occupation of Native American lands in the Southwest took different forms, all involving force; there were frequent skirmishes between soldiers and Native Americans, or between missionaries/settlers and Native Americans. This was a territorial form of imperialism that not only dispossessed the indigenous populations of their lands, displacing them from their villages and hunting grounds, but also dispossessed them through the intervention of the missions, enforcing new labor regimes. In Alta California, where the mission system was paramount, coercion did not always involve warfare. The missionaries found ways to entice the Native Americans to the mission through gifts of food and clothing, as well as through pageantry, music, and rites, and then compelling them to work for the mission. Since not all the Native Americans submitted to being Christianized, not all were forced to stay to work for the missions; in Alta California many of them “self-relocated” to the eastern part of the territory where settlers rarely ventured. In the territory that would become New Mexico, dispossession and subjugation were soon accompanied by settler colonialism, as Juan de Oñate in 1598 brought in not only missionaries and soldiers but also settlers who proceeded to impose the *encomienda* system until the Native Americans rebelled in 1680. After the recolonizing of the territory in 1692 with the return of the Spanish settlers and soldiers and the elimination of the *encomienda* system, some of the Native Americans became workers on Spanish settlements or maintained their own lands and pueblos. Contrary to what is noted by Wolfe with respect to settler colonialism, the Spanish model in the Southwest used various strategies to impose its predominance, such as removing the indigenous populations, forcing them to relocate to other geographic areas, and subjugating them and forcing them to work for the missionaries and settlers. There were multiple modalities of colonialism at work.

The makeup of these settlers varied, with more criollos and Spaniards moving to New Mexico and Texas than to Alta California, where the soldiers and few settlers were mostly mestizos, mulattoes, and Baja California Natives, with a few criollos and Spaniards. In Texas many of the Native Americans were exterminated by Spanish, Mexican, and later Anglo settlers and soldiers. The missionization of the indigenous peoples in central and east Texas failed, for the most part; south Texas would be settled by *rancheros* seeking to expand their holdings from what are now border Mexican states. Throughout the Southwest, Native American labor was the overall basis for production, both

during the Spanish colonial era and during the Mexican period. Most of the Native Americans worked for subsistence, clothing, and housing; in Texas, Native American peons became what could best be termed indentured servants, inheriting the debts of their parents and adding their own. Thus, during the Mexican period, and even after 1848 in Texas, the Native Americans continued to be tied to the ranchos through peonage and debt servitude. Some of these Southwest Natives assimilated to varying degrees and acculturated to the Spanish or Mexican colonial culture, although many refused to abandon their religious practices and traditions, especially those who chose to live apart from the Spanish/Mexican settlers and missions in their own pueblos or *rancherías*.

Unlike the indigenous Palestinians, however, the Mexicans in Texas were colonist settlers or their descendants. These Mexicans had not lived there for hundreds or thousands of years. A new group of colonist settlers would arrive in the 1820s when the Mexican government foolishly allowed Anglo settlers from the United States to take up land in the Texas province. Mexico as a nation-state had been in existence only since 1821 when, fifteen years later, Anglo settlers in Texas (and it should be said, a good portion of the Mexican Tejanos with them) declared their independence from Mexico. The demographic shift was astonishingly swift; by 1836 there were in Texas some 30,000 Anglo Americans, 3,470 Mexicans, and 2,000 blacks, almost all slaves. Unlike the Mexican settlers who used Native American labor, the Anglo colonists instituted the regime of slave labor, despite the fact that Mexico had abolished slavery with independence. After 1836 Anglo settlers came by the thousands. By 1847 the white population was over 100,000, with 35,000 slaves, and there were fewer than 5,000 Mexicans. While the United States clearly welcomed and encouraged the establishment of Anglo settlements in Texas, it did not force these Anglo settler colonists on Mexican Texas at the point of a gun in the way twentieth-century Britain and the Zionists forced Israeli settlements on Palestine with warfare. Later, of course, after the United States had incorporated Texas as a state in 1845, it would in fact use military force to retain the Texas territory, since it continued to be claimed by Mexico even after 1836.

In California a similar colonist situation ensued with the arrival of Spanish missionaries, soldiers, their families, and military officials in 1769. All came to carry out the occupation of the lands of native peoples who would be dispossessed and displaced primarily by force. Alta California, as upper California was called, never did attract many settlers from Mexico, for the territory was far from central Mexico and considered an undesirable, impoverished wilderness with “savage” Native Americans. The settler colonists, the Californios, whether mestizos, mulattoes, Natives, criollos, or Spaniards, all represented

the Spanish crown, from 1769 to 1821, and later Mexico, from 1821 to 1846. By 1845 there were, all told, in Alta California, a mere 6,900 Californios, as well as 3,180 ex-mission Native Americans and some 680 foreigners, primarily from the United States and Europe. The number of nonmission Native Americans is of course not known; many had died from the triple scourge of invasion: smallpox, measles, and violence, but it would be these non-mission Native Americans who had the greatest survivability. The Spanish/Mexican colonists, who had been in Alta California only a short period of time, with the majority coming after 1800—not thousands of years like the Native Americans—would in turn be demographically displaced in short order by an overwhelming onslaught of Anglo colonists, especially during and after the 1849 gold rush period.

In 1846 these northern Mexican territories were invaded and occupied by the US Army. The indigenous populations inhabiting parts of the Southwest would suffer dispossession again, now along with the more recent Californio, Tejano, and Nuevo Mexicano settlers. Force would be used against the Native Americans to take their lands, but dispossession of the Californios primarily involved the dynamic deployment of laws and capital.

The material dispossession of the Californios would be put into effect within three or four decades with incorporation into the US nation-state and insertion into the US national economy, as well as a new capitalist mode of production and the institution of a new political and legal system. The principal mechanism to effect this landholding transfer and carry out—legally—the dispossession and destitution of the Californio population was the Land Act of 1851. This dispossession came, not through forced removal, not through massacres and bombings, not through terrorist acts, as in Palestine, but significantly through decrees, laws, the courts, and banks, in other words, the interventions of government and commerce, that is, the state and capital. The Californios were not forced to leave the territory, abandon their homes, and flee south of the border to escape armed aggression, like the Palestinians who have had to flee into what is now Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza, and the West Bank. No, in California, the capitalists, speculators, and land companies had other means of dispossession at their disposal. Here the dispossession was to be “legally enacted,” and it was calculated to allow land speculators and capitalists—not squatters or settlers—to in the end appropriate the vast tracts of Native American land that the Californios had wrongfully claimed. Interestingly, if not ironically, these capitalists had little interest in declaring the Californio lands *public lands*, counter to the wishes and protests of squatters and homesteaders. Their long-term objectives were best met in fact by seeing Californio colonial claims of thousands of acres validated by the courts.

Land rich but without money, the Californios had to mortgage their property to pay their taxes and hire lawyers to present their titles to the Land Commission. By the time a Californio land title came before the commission or the appellate courts, by the time most titles were validated, the Californios, for the most part, no longer owned the land. The Californios were not, then, displaced by the squatters or settlers but by land speculators, mortgage companies, banks, capitalists, and land companies and vetted by agencies of the state. Papers in the form of mortgages and liens were the weapons of choice used against them, most effectively carrying out their dispossession and reduction to a subordinated population. Socially, the Californios would suffer discrimination, segregation, lynchings, and xenophobia and, with the passing of time, Mexican immigrants would likewise be subject to displacement and criminalization by various and sundry mechanisms.

Conquest did not deprive Californios, Tejanos, and Nuevo Mexicanos in the newly annexed lands of the US Southwest of basic necessities, as has apartheid in Israel. No, after the US invasion, Mexican settlers and *rancheros* underwent proletarianization and rapidly became the providers of wage labor. The limited number of Californios could not, however, meet the growing demands for labor in nineteenth-century California; the solution was the importation of a foreign labor force. Those workers were Chinese, settlers of another type, labor settlers/migrant workers, like the many waves of Latin American immigrants today within the United States.

In Texas, matters played out somewhat differently than in California, but the end result was the subaltern social location of Tejanos/Mexicanos. Like the Palestinians, Tejanos would suffer institutional and societal discrimination after 1848, evident especially in racism, lynchings, separate and unequal educational facilities, Ranger violence, exploitation in the cotton fields, and limited voting rights. To a much greater degree, for example, than California, Texas attracted continued Mexican immigration during the nineteenth century and especially around 1900—more so during and after the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Thus, rather than evidencing a reduction in Mexican population or a removal of Mexicans, despite dispossession of Mexican lands—primarily through economic and legal means—the Mexican origin population in Texas, although disempowered, grew after 1848. Some historians indicate that Tejano landholders were initially able to maintain control of their lands and that, by and large, they chose to stay in Texas.¹⁸ It was not till late in the nineteenth century that the displacement of Mexican *ranchero* landholders in South Texas would largely take place.

Let us return for a moment to the issue of settler colonialism in Israel. Just in the sheer numbers of displaced populations, and in the “state of exception”

established by Israel against the Palestinians, one can see a clear difference between Israeli settler colonialism in Palestine today and US settler colonialism in the nineteenth century. Palestinians who reside in Israel and are citizens of Israel face more than fifty Israeli discriminatory laws, including rights to political participation and access to land, education, state budget resources, and criminal procedures—in effect a process of ghettoization.¹⁹ Nothing that occurred in the Southwest after 1848 compares, however, with what took place and what we continue to see in Palestine post-1948. Neither were the Tejanos, Nuevo Mexicanos, and Californios forced to leave the territory or placed in reservations, nor were their barrios closed off from areas of work by a barrier or fence, nor were they forced to have passes to move about the Southwest. Racism and class factors took care of that and segregated them in low-income barrios. Citizenship was not an issue, albeit theirs, granted after the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, was clearly a second-class citizenship status, at best, much like the Palestinians in Israel.

Commonalities and Differences

Surface similarities between Chicano/Latino and Palestinian situations can, in the end, prove deceptive and blind us to the fact that the Palestinian dispossession at work is in fact even more egregious in that it is more akin to the much more grand-scale destitution and genocide practiced on Native Americans rather than the “low-intensity warfare” waged against Chicanos/as/Latinos/as in the United States. We have to see that the truly colonized in the Southwest were the Native Americans, first by the people of Mexican origin and later by the Anglo settlers.

In effect what happened in the US Southwest is that one group of colonists was replaced by another group of colonists. In the process we, the descendants of the first group, much like the Chinese workers and blacks, after abolition, suffered racism, xenophobia, linguistic and cultural oppression, disenfranchisement and exploitation. Today we, whether native born or immigrants (documented or undocumented), continue to suffer criminalization and xenophobia as well and are treated as “foreigners in our native land,” as is evident in ICE and Border Patrol raids, and, in several state measures, like those of Arizona, Alabama, and Georgia, denying us the right to education, medical care, housing, welfare, and employment. But the question remains: is this colonialism? And as a corollary: Are we suffering from a colonized mentality because our colonial and colonizing ancestors were conquered?

The point here is not to say that the situation of Chicanos/as/ Latinos/as post-1848 and present has been good. There is still today an obscenely high

poverty level and low schooling attainment, and our barrios are marked by unemployment and violence of all stripes. Racial profiling and ongoing surveillance and police brutality are standard operating practices of the Southwest states, but—paradoxically—some Chicanos/as have also become state agents of coercion, of the Migra and the police. As our numbers increase—we are now some 53 million Latinos/as in the country and we constitute 39 percent of the population in California—we are increasingly elected to political office, but that, in and of itself, does not necessarily imply more or better representation or more effective remedies for the problems that Chicanos/as/Latinos/as face in the present-day United States. We too suffer under the growth of corporate power and finance capital that faces no constraints, no limits to its profit making. We suffer the effects—perhaps disproportionately—of a warmongering government that continually finds new sites to invade and bomb, that seeks to establish military bases in every part of the world, that bails out corporations and banks but not the poor, not the homeless, not the families who lose their homes. But is this commensurate to the condition of the Palestinian people? It would make more sense, to our mind, and be more historically accurate, to draw parallels between the condition and treatment of the Native American population—past and present—within the United States.

Up against the Wall . . .

What about the US–Mexico border fence that would span twelve hundred miles? Is the fence erected on the border truly comparable with the wall separating the West Bank and Israel? To our mind, not really. Has the border fence established a siege mentality like that experienced by Palestinians? Border violence and militarization are a reality, to be sure, but we are not under siege; we are not denied humanitarian aid or deprived of border crossing. At least not yet. We do suffer the curtailment of public social services, but so do all working-class people in this country. The border wall does in fact separate families, but those family members on the other side are not for the most part native to the Southwest, as is the case of Palestinians who *are* native to the Israeli-occupied lands. The military aggression directed by Israel against the Palestinians and the number of atrocities committed by the Israelis against people in Gaza are not—yet—our reality. No, the differences are clear. The fence on the West Bank is separating former residents of Palestine from their homes. The fence on the US–Mexico border is not in the same way separating former or present Californios or Tejanos from their homes. In 1848 and its aftermath Californios were not forced to leave Alta California. In 1846 Tijuana was nothing more than a small ranch. The present-day megacity of

Tijuana is not the product of displaced Californian Mexicans who fled south but a product of migration north from the interior of Mexico, a way station on the way to the United States and today, officially, a city of over a million and a half (unofficially, a population of over 3 million) and a center for maquila assembly plant production that draws thousands yearly to the area. Historically, we need to recall, most of the Mexicans who were in California in 1848 stayed.

In fact, the fence or wall that separates Tijuana from San Diego is trying to keep out present-day Mexicans and Central Americans (who care little about historical land tenancy issues) from crossing the border to work in the United States. Although here they will be highly exploited and feel alienated, they will be able to work, eat, and send their remittances home, their primary concern, so that the rest of the family can eat as well. In time they will settle here and form new communities and barrios, and for the next generation this will be home. For their part, Mexicans in Mexico today see the US Southwest as foreign land, as *gringolandia*, not as their native land, however much their families may be affected by the ebbs and flows of migratory processes between the two nations. For Mexican immigrants in the United States, their native land is Michoacan, Zacatecas, Oaxaca, Jalisco, or Sonora. This is not, however, the case for the Palestinians, whose parents or they themselves have been forced out of their homes and who today are still being pushed out of the West Bank and out of Jerusalem by new settlements and the construction of walls and fences.

The 1846–48 war created new national borders, but for many years the border was highly permeable, as it was fairly easy for Mexicans to cross over, yet few came until the Mexican Revolution. In fact, by 1870 there were more Chinese workers in California (fifty thousand, according to Alexander Saxton) than workers of Mexican origin.²⁰ As previously noted, we must acknowledge the fact that most US Chicanos/as/Latinos/as today are *not* the descendants of the few thousand Mexican settlers who were in the Southwest in 1846. Post-1900 immigrants came to work the land of others; we came to work in the ranches, the mines, and the factories. But we stayed, and today a good number of us Latinos/as—60 percent—are native born, although 40 percent of some estimated 53 million are first-generation immigrants, having come to the United States in the last few decades. Today, we, the people of Mexican and Latin American origin, are the new settlers, not colonial settlers, but rather transnational laboring settlers who will in turn inevitably become the majority population of the United States. If anything, our trajectory more closely parallels that of the previous waves of immigration, like that of the Irish, for example, than that of the Palestinians of today.

Still, the histories of both the Palestinian people and Chicanos/as/Latinos/as in the United States speak volumes about the many ways that the powerful exercise their domination, even if in very different ways and through very different means. What has to become clear is that, differences notwithstanding, we share much, and we, Chicanos and Chicanas, need to stand with our Palestinian brothers and sisters against the continued aggression in their homeland. The Palestinian cause is not at all difficult for us to understand, historically, politically, and ethically, and the push for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) has to be our cause as well.

Withholding Support: Apartheid States

Recently, Secretary of State John Kerry acknowledged, even if rather late, that Israel risks becoming an apartheid state, but as supporters of the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation have noted, Israel is already an apartheid state. Ali Abunimah recalls that in 2004 the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel was launched.²¹ Eight years later at a conference in Washington, DC, President Barack Obama was still vowing to stand by Israel against efforts to delegitimize the state of Israel. Inspired by the campaign against apartheid in South Africa in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the BDS movement calls on academics and civil organizations to demand that Israel end its occupation and colonization of Palestine. As Omar Barghouti has stated, the BDS movement is a “qualitatively new stage in the century-old Palestinian resistance to the Zionist settler-colonial conquest, and later, Israel’s regime of occupation, dispossession and apartheid against the indigenous people of Palestine.”²²

The BDS movement grows, attracting ever broader support from academic associations as well as global companies, even nation-states. In April 2013 the Association for Asian American Studies voted to boycott Israeli universities and academic institutions. In December 2013 it was joined by the American Studies Association and the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association. These associations base support of the boycott on a series of compelling reasons: Israel’s violation of international law and UN resolutions; the documented impact of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian scholars and students; and the fact that Israeli institutions of higher education are often party to state policies that violate human rights. Students across the United States and Europe have mobilized in support of BDS, and numerous academics, including the British physicist Stephen Hawking, who boycotted the Israeli Presidential Conference,

and Chomsky, have advocated for the academic and cultural boycott of Israel. At UCLA, students are critiquing student government leaders' acceptance of free trips to Israel sponsored by pro-Israel lobbyists.²³ Boycotts are a nonviolent form of political expression yet allow for taking a stand. Chicanos/as/Latinos/as and others need to stand in solidarity with Palestinians in calling for BDS, rejecting efforts, whether by intimidation or co-optation, to silence our freedom of expression.

The demographic transformation and *latinization* of the United States is already an incontrovertible fact. But that in and of itself will not guarantee our rights or self-determination or necessarily mean an end to oppression, repression, and exploitation. And in this regard, both the case of apartheid-era South Africa as well as the treatment and displacement of the Palestinian people should serve as cautionary tales for US Chicanos/as/Latinos/as, reminding us that neither sheer numbers nor ancestral claims to land necessarily ensure against injustice and oppression.

Notes

1. See Tomás Almaguer, "Ideological Distortions in Recent Chicano Historiography," *Aztlán* 18.1 (1989): 7–28. See also Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999); and Manuel Hernández, *El colonialismo interno en la narrativa chicana* (Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1994).
2. Fredric Jameson, "Persistencies of the Dialectic: Three Sites," *Science and Society* 62.3 (1998): 358–72.
3. Laura Pulido and David Lloyd, "In the Long Shadow of the Settler: On Israeli and U.S. Colonialisms," *American Quarterly* 62.4 (2010): 795–809.
4. Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (London: Cassell, 1999), 1.
5. *Ibid.*, 2.
6. Geronimo, *His Own Story: As Told to S. M. Barrett* (New York: Penguin/Meridian Book, 1996), 169. The Apache, descended from Athabascan-speaking people in Alaska, are thought to have migrated to the Southwest around 1200 CE and thereafter.
7. Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 6.
8. Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle* (Boston: South End, 1983), 91.
9. *Ibid.*, 92.
10. See "Is Israel an Apartheid State?" (summary of an international legal study funded and coordinated by the government of South Africa), <http://icahdusa.org/2010/03/is-israel-an-apartheid-state>. See also Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle*, 96.
11. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 25.
12. These criteria were established by the South Africa study that found that the Israeli occupation of Palestine "has become a colonial enterprise which implements a system of apartheid." See "Is Israel an Apartheid State?," 2.
13. Massimo De Angelis, "Separating the Doing and the Deed: Capital and the Continuous Character of Enclosures," *Historical Materialism* 12.2 (2004): 57–99.
14. Pablo González Casanova, *De la sociología del poder a la sociología de la explotación*, *Pensar América Latina en el siglo XXI* (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2009).

15. Alex Callinicos, *Imperialism and Global Political Economy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 190–91.
16. Noam Chomsky, “In Israel, a Tsunami Warning,” July 7, 2011, www.truthout.org/israel-tsunami-warning/1310042953.
17. <https://diasporabr.com.br/posts/220112>.
18. Armando C. Alonzo, *Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1734–1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 159.
19. For a list of Israeli laws enumerated by the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, see “Kerry Is Wrong: Israel Is Already an Apartheid State,” May 2, 2014, www.joshruuebner.com/?p=1090.
20. Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 3.
21. Ali Abunimah, *The Battle for Justice in Palestine* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 125.
22. Omar Barghouti, *BDS: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 62.
23. Jason Song, “Stances on Israel Roil UCLA campus,” *L.A. Times*, May 20, 2014.

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Jennifer L. Pierce

Jennifer L. Pierce is a professor in the Department of American Studies, a Frenzel Chair in the Liberal Arts, and a former director of the Center for Advanced Feminist Studies at the University of Minnesota. Her research has followed two related trajectories, one in the ethnography of work and workplaces and several collaborative projects on different aspects of her methodological areas of expertise in personal narrative analysis. Her recent books include *Racing for Innocence: Whiteness, Gender, and the Backlash against Affirmative Action* (Stanford University Press, 2012) and *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Cornell University Press, 2008) with M. J. Maynes and Barbara Laslett. She is also the member of the GLBT Oral History Project that produced the book *Queer Twin Cities* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

Beatrice Pita

Beatrice Pita teaches in the Spanish section of the Department of Literature at the University of California, San Diego. With Rosaura Sánchez, she has edited and written the introduction to Ruiz de Burton’s two novels, *The Squatter and the Don* (Arte Público Press, 1992) and *Who Would Have Thought It?* (Arte Público Press, 1995). *Conflicts of Interest: The Letters of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton*, also written in collaboration with Rosaura Sánchez, appeared in 2001 (Arte Público Press).

Catherine S. Ramírez

Catherine S. Ramírez is associate professor of Latin American and Latino studies and director of the Chicano Latino Research Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is the author of *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Duke University Press, 2009) and is a cofounder and coeditor of the Latino Cultures Network (<http://lcn.cdh.ucla.edu/>), an open-access website that models and promotes new research, pedagogy, and collaborative scholarship in Latino studies. She

is writing a history of assimilation as a concept, policy, and practice in the United States.

Rosaura Sánchez

Rosaura Sánchez is professor in the Department of Literature at the University of California, San Diego. As a member of the Spanish, Cultural Studies, and English sections of the department, she teaches courses in Chicano/a literature, Latin American literature, and critical theory. Her work in critical theory, literary analysis, and sociolinguistics has appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies. Her fiction has also been published in various journals. She is the author of *Chicano Discourse* (Newbury House Publisher, 1983) and *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios* (University of Minnesota Press, 1995), and coedited the republication of two novels by Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don* (Arte Público Press, 1992) and *Who Would Have Thought It?* (Arte Público Press, 1995).

Nikhil Pal Singh

Nikhil Pal Singh is associate professor of social and cultural analysis, director of Graduate Studies in the American Studies and Africana Studies Programs, and faculty director of the Prison Education Program at New York University. His published works include *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Harvard University Press, 2004) and *Climbin' Jacob's Ladder: The Black Freedom Movement Writings of Jack O'Dell*, with Jack O'Dell (University of California Press, 2010). A new book, "Governing the Whole: America's Exceptional Empire," is forthcoming from Harvard University Press.

Min Hyoung Song

Min Hyoung Song is professor of English at Boston College, where he directs both the English MA Program and the Asian American Studies Program. He is the author of *The Children of 1965: On Writing, and Not Writing, as an Asian American* (Duke University Press, 2013) and *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (Duke University Press, 2005), as well as several journal articles and book chapters. He is also the outgoing editor of the *Journal of Asian American Studies*, coeditor of *Asian American Studies: A Reader*, and is coediting (with Rajini Srikanth) a forthcoming volume titled *The Cambridge History of Asian American Literature*.

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